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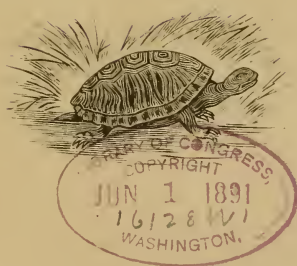
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



The Fate of the Leaf.

BY
I. McC. WILSON.



CUSHING & COMPANY,
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"Discite quomodo lilia agrorum augescant."

"Deus herbam agri ita circumvestit."

"We are spirits clad in veils,

Man by man was never seen ;

All our deep communing fails

To remove the shadowy screen."



The Fate of the Leaf.



SLOWLY and calmly, through the milky haze
That lay upon the woodland and the field,
One noonday in October, warm and still,
Wandered a lonely Seer.

Hoary his head,
Though yet unbent his form by weight of years:
For after discipline of trials sore,
Relenting Time had found him in his prime,
Wrecked on the rocks of sorrow's rugged shore,
And lifting him upon her strong, swift wings,
Had borne him safely on through life, aloft,
So gently that he never had perceived
Her silent flight. But with a lowly heart,
A single soul at peace with all things else,
And bearing benizons as beams the sun,

Ever upon some gracious mission bent,
He went his lonely way.

Lonely perforce;

Whether amid the throng, or all apart :
Since they who see afar in mental realms,
Who breathe pure Reason's cold, clear atmosphere,
Have mounted summits of exalted thought
To pierce the distance with their daring gaze:
And mountain-peaks must stand alone, or melt
To the mere level of an upper plain.
Thus, even Nature has a price affixed
To certain of her wares. And evermore,
In mental, moral, physical domains,
The law is one; always the world demands
A tax of virtue. Though it serve all else,
The penalty of excellence must be
To dwell remote, even from the near, or dear,
And find, where'er it lodge, the hermit's cell.

Clouds there were none to shadow o'er the path
Of the lone Sage: nor was there any gleam
Of cheerful sunshine, kindly lighting up
His silent way. Only the misty air

Was dimly luminous; and filmy folds
Of the Madonna's gossamer unfurled
In formless shreds of visionary grace,
Which melted on the view. And whitely glowed,
Like a vast, heated pearl, the vault serene
Of the high heavens, as when in that first day
Of the creation's birth, God spoke the light
Into existence, ere the sun appeared.

Long lines of smoky hills, where Autumn's fires
Fed, smouldering, upon the dying Year,
Even before it breathed its latest sigh,
Retreating, shrank away, and from their sides
Thrust out the burning maples, all aflame
With crimson, green, and golden lights, absorbed
From neighboring growths, all wanly faded now.
Boldly relieved against the ashen skies
Loomed the grim figures of the fragrant pines;
In russet vineyards, on the terraced cliffs,
Dark purple clusters, gathering their stores,
Among the leaves ambushed their potencies:
While on high boughs the red-gold apples shone
Like stars, above the stony orchard-walls,

Which shut the wayfarer from their delights,
As rise those walls of adamant that guard
The happy Islands with ambrosial fields
Where dwell the blest Immortals.

Weary grown,
And wooed by Nature's charming wiles, the Sage,
Reclining, rested on a mossy slope;
And lingered, loth to leave so fair a spot:—
A hill-side where adventurous trees came down,
And, crowding, stood around a sleepy pool,
And saw their variously graceful forms
Reflected there, and wonderingly scanned
The revelation of their loveliness.
Then, gazing thence, across the fields afar,
Stood still, in blank amazement rooted fast,
Much marveling to find the world so large;
Much questioning concerning how and why
Such vastness and variety of earth
Could thus exist, external to themselves.

Here stood the stately oak, the king of trees,
In regal robes, and burnished armor clad,
Holding his court, though brief his time to reign,

And taking counsel with his valiant squires.
Tall elms stood by, princes of high degree;
And stalwart chestnuts, knights well-tried and
true,

Resplendent shone in golden coats-of-mail.
Locusts were ladies in pale draperies;
And mountain-ashes brilliant maidens fair,
With corals decked, and graced with dark-green
plumes.

Cedars and pines as trusty warders stood;
The sullen larch, on schemes of treason bent,
With traitor's fingers beckoned to its mates;
A mulberry, with scrolls of curling leaves,
Appeared as royal scribe; upon this hand,
Came trains of nut-trees bearing precious gifts;
On that, were grouped dejected prisoners,
A band of captive maples, in whose forms
The wounded vassals of the Summer slain
Drooped, bleeding at each pore. While all around,
Lissome and lithe, in waiting humbler trees
Obsequious bent, good servitors at need.

In this brave company the thoughtful Seer

Feasted upon the beauty of the scene,
And drank deep draughts of peace, feeling the
throb

Of languid Nature's pulses soothing surge
Through his calm soul. And as he idly watched
The falling leaves that, ever and anon,
Fluttered and swirled, or floating sailed, and fell
Upon the mossy couch whereon he lay,
He mused upon the transitory state
Of human life, and earthly joy and good.
He pondered much and long upon the theme,
So sad in minds of most, how mortal men
Through all the ages come successively,
In generations endless to recount,
To live, love, suffer, for so brief a space,
And then vanish from this mundane scene,
Leaving no trace behind; as yearly pass
The dead and fallen leaves of forests vast
Out of existence, to return to dust,
Blending their essence with the elements.

As thus he mused, there smote upon his
thought

A feeble cry, that seemed a formless voice
Ascending from the ground; a little thread
Of tenuous, weak sound, that wound about
His wandering sense, and caught, and fettered
held

His wondering ear, and kindly soul, attent.
A plaintive voice, so full of tears and pain,
And wailing such profundity of woe,
That startled leaves upon the boughs above
Shrank up in shriveling fear, and fainting fell,
And lay supine among their kindred brown,
Who, shuddering, rustled, though no breezes
stirred.

“Death! Death!” the small voice cried, “Oh
would that thou,
Thy single self, couldst die, instead of all
The helpless myriads who perish now,
The victims of thy senseless tyranny!
Though vain atonement were thy one dark life
For all the countless hosts thy madness slays.

“Dear Lord of Life! hast thou no power to
stay

The ruthless ravage of this frightful foe
Whose wanton will such desolation deals
Among the fair creations of thy hand?
Lord, it is horrible to perish so!
To know the blessedness of conscious life;
To taste the sweetness of existence; learn
To know and love the beauteous world, and feel
The ecstasy of being; the delight
Of converse with a thousand forms of life,
And vainly then to fade, and die, and sink
Into eternal nothingness; to melt
Into thin air, be whirled on every wind,
And so, dispersed through boundless space, to
pass
Into oblivion! Oh better far
It would have been never to see the day,
And know the gladness of the universe;
Or else to die, if die we must, with one
Swift, sudden stroke, unconscious of our doom!"

It was a fallen Maple Leaf that spoke:
Prone, on the ground beside the Seer it lay,
And moaned, and hid its bleeding, tear-stained
face

All soiled with dust and grime; and sobbed, and
sighed,

Until, at length exhausted, it grew still:
Its tremors ceased, and utter silence fell,
As though the peace of death had settled down
Upon the little broken heart at rest.

But, as it oft befalls that Life holds fast
With potent claim upon the form it fills,
Unwilling to relax its loving clasp
Upon the treasure that has grown so dear,
So, in a little space the leaflet stirred,
And softly, calmly, sweetly spoke again.

“Ah! well do I remember,” then it said,
“That April morning when my life began,
My conscious life of blessedness supreme,
Which memory transmutes to pain as keen.
In my bark cradle, swung on yonder tree,—
O Home beloved! but lost forever now!—
I felt some sudden force that rent apart
The curtains of the chamber where I lay,
And woke me to the ecstasies of sense,
With wondering thrill that asked if I were I, .

And heard, and knew the answer, self-assured.

“Then I was bathed in floods of living light;
I drank delicious sunshine; and the breeze,
That wafted fleecy fleets across the skies,
Came down, and breathed upon me, and I sprang
With one strong bound, into that wondrous
realm

Where things external seize upon the soul,
Drawing it forth through countless avenues,
Until throughout the universe infused,
It fills the utmost bounds of ample space.
Thus, in the bliss that potent being brings,
I reveled, till the joy became too great
For one small heart to bear alone; and then,
Incredulous with wonder, I beheld
The millions of my comrades, all around,
On every tree and bush, awaking, too;
And in glad unison, with swelling hearts,
Together we rejoiced; and happier grew
With each new morning's dewy dawn.

“Ah, well!

Those blessed days are gone! Why should I vex

My fainting soul, why rend each shrinking nerve,
With recollections of past happiness?
What folly is it, now, to tell, or think,
How all those bright and balmy days of spring,
With warp of hues cerulean, absorbed
From the clear skies above us bent, and weft
Of golden sunshine glinting through and through,
We spun and wove our gay green robes; and how,
Arrayed in glorious attire, we sat
Upon our own beloved boughs, and watched
The growing splendors of each dawning day;
And saw the flowerets deck the gladsome earth;
And heard the tuneful birds rehearse their lays;
And followed with our grateful gaze the sun,
As he pursued his curving course on high,
Pouring upon the world his vital rays.
Or, when at even he had laid his head
Upon his gorgeous pillows in the west,
How, one by one, we saw the piercing eyes
Of the wide heavens unclose, amid the shades
Of deepening twilight, for their faithful watch

Through dead of night, o'er sleeping Day's
domain.

“Why should I tell, how in those solemn hours,
When earth was tranquil, and all life lay still,
We watched the starry hosts march o'er the sky,
And blessed the gracious influence they shed?
How, when the meek moon swam the heavenly
seas,

And the light breezes swayed us to and fro,
With fluttering hearts we whispered to our mates
Our tales and promises of deathless love?
Or what, when darkness wrapped her deadly folds
Around the world, extinguishing the day,
And blotting out the night, was our dismay
At loss of light, and promise of despair?—
Until, at length, we learned that never yet
Have powers of darkness permanence possessed;
For light is ever stronger, and dissolves
The fearful texture of their dismal forms
In gracious balms, which but refresh and bless.

“Therefore we shrank not at the storm's wild
roar;

But loved the mighty music rolling down
The smitten arches of the iron skies
In crashing thunder-tones. The lightning's
gleam

Sent thrills electric flashing through our veins:
And when the mad winds raved, our myriad hosts
Danced wildly to the measures that they blew,
Like demons whirling in their frantic glee.
So when the reckless rains, in their descent,
Dashed fiercely in our faces, and were fain
To beat us to the ground, with eager thirst
We drank the streams of life which they supplied,
Nor blamed them for their forceful energy.
And when the storm had spent itself, at last,
And morning dawned again; when fresh and fair,
And lovely and delightful, all things grew,
We smiled our silent thanks; while happy birds,
Exultant, caroled forth their gratitude
To the great Giver of all life and good.

“But why do I recall departed joys?
Or why should I recount what next befell?
Alas! I know not what it is that thus

Impels the utterance of my complaint.
How should I know, whose very senses fail,
What quickens life, and quenches then its flame?
Who knows the secret of life's mystic spell?
Why life enthralls us? Why we cling to it
With energies that baffle death's despair?
Who knows all this, haply he understands
What impulse prompts the death-song of the
swan,

To which all Nature swells the wild refrain:
As forests with illuminations flame
When all their light of life is dying out;
And setting suns emblazon on the skies
Their glorious record of death-agonies.
But all a simple dying leaf may know,
Whose thoughts each moment grow more
strangely dim,

Is only this: When pent-up sorrows swell
Within the soul, and the heart's walls are strained
Beyond their utmost tension, and collapse,
There gushes forth, without restraint, that flood

Of tears and life-blood, mingled, which hence-
forth,

No more returning, nevermore may flow.

“So, in this stress I pour out my complaint,
And all my hapless history relate,
Though I would fain be silent, when to speak
Is but to tell how, from the heights of bliss,
I, and the comrades dear who share my doom,
Have now descended to this sad estate.

“Already, in bewildered grief have I
Rehearsed the raptures of our natal hour,
When the flood-tide of life swept o’er the earth,
And birds and insects sang the Season’s birth,
Till the whole world rang with the harmony.
Though we, dear Nature’s most prolific brood,
Were happiest of all, yet might be mute,
Since all things came to us by Nature’s grace
That left us naught to pray for, nor to fear,
Nor heed of grateful dues. But let this pass:
Our bright, brief moments of felicity
Transcend my powers to express; and so
The glad delirium of our happiness

Now and forever must remain unsung.
While the sad story of our mortal grief
Is hasting to its close, and soon my plaint,
In utter and eternal silence stilled
Shall cease forevermore.

“There came a change.
The summer days grew long, and scorching
droughts
Drank up the streams, absorbed the dews, and
sucked
The fresh, sweet currents bounding in our veins.
All nature paused; and for a space it seemed
That the whole world stood still. No breezes
came
To fan our fevered frames. No dews nor rains
To quench the thirst by which we were consumed.
The birds that in the spring-time, joyously
Awoke each morning with their festive glee,
Forgot to sing, but sat upon their boughs
Brooding in moody silence. Then we grew,
Like all the world around us, careless quite.
Listless we hung; and sleeplessly we dreamed,
Confusing past and present, in a maze

Of phantom fallacies. Whether awake
Or sleeping, now concerned us not; nor yet
What might befall. Indifferent were we,
And senseless; with no single waking thought
Except a dim perception that each day
The tardy sun, that later brought the morn,
Walked not so high across the heavenly fields,
And sooner sank to rest. And that the days,
Though shorter grown, in some mysterious way
Contrived their course more slowly to pursue;
While by the magic of this wondrous time
Still longer nights succeeded every day.

“So this went on; and still no care had we;
Naught we enjoyed; nor suffered; nor desired;
But like to men to all appearance dead,
Though still possessing each arrested sense;
Or as mere carved and conscious images,
Suspended in an atmosphere of life,
We seemed eternal in our fixed estate.

“How long this lasted I shall never know:
But suddenly a new experience came.
For one grey dawn the woods were all astir

With baleful winds that blew in mystic tones
Of warning, which we did not comprehend.
Then gloomed the skies, and equinoctial gales
Beat us with wings unpitying; the while
In rains unceasing steeped, we bore the brunt
Of such wild elemental strife as I
Was sure no creature ever could survive.
And certainly Death sped the arrow then
Whose work I wait.

“However, to my tale.

The storms passed by, and Nature smiled again.
Not now, with mother-love, as heretofore,
But with a gleaming glance of treachery
That we were all too simple to distrust.
So, when upon the breeze there wandered by
Strange whisperings; and through the peaceful
skies

Long lines of dismal birds, with hollow cries,
Sailed, ominous, away to distant climes,
No portent heeded we, whose witless minds
Knew not the dread realities of Death.
Hence, I but grew exultant when I felt

The fever of a sharp frost strike my frame
And set my scanty, stagnant blood on fire.
Then, soon, a new, fierce energy flashed out
In our innumerable brotherhood;
And all our wonted vigor leaped to life,
And each nerve tingled with sensations keen,
As in the chill of the long frosty nights
The fiery breath of Powers invisible
With burning kisses stung us back to life.

“What next occurred to us I cannot say:
I know not Nature’s wondrous processes
Whose seeming and whose meaning vary so.
We had no thought of coming ills; but next
We soon perceived that from our shrinking veins,
The bright blue tints, whose pure celestial hue
The vernal skies so freely yielded us,
Were paling, day by day, and fading out;
Though yet the garnered gleams of sunshine
shone
In the gay garments of our new array.
And when the strange fires burning in our
breasts

Blazed out in flames vermilion, and bedecked
Our draperies with darkly purple spots,
We thought this hectic flush, these fatal stains,
The splendors of rare Tyrian dyes must be,
Not, as they were, the livid hues of death.
Such ignorant and stupid souls were we!

“And if, ashamed, I now proceed to own
The measure of our wild fatuity,
I must relate how to our hearts this change
Brought glad conviction that our time to bloom
Had thus, at length, in season due, arrived.
That Nature, through her laws beneficent,
Was in this wise transforming us to flowers
More gorgeous than those painted things that
grew,

All summer long, around us in the grass:
Whom now, in scorn, we loftily despised,
As with this joy our spirits grew elate.

“Must I recount our further folly? Tell
The tale of all our stark stupidity?
It passes faith; and much I marvel now,
At such preposterous credulity;

But true it is that after certain days,
Délectable, thrilled with the glad amaze
That we had reached development of bloom,
There came a time when, wondering, we felt
Our hold upon our parent stems relax,
Which every motion threatened to detach
From that dear spot where we so long had dwelt.
Till finally we found ourselves set free;
And then we fluttered joyously away,
Imagining, poor idiots! that we,
By Nature's favor, had been turned to birds,
And henceforth we might fly from tree to tree,
And soar into the skies, and sing such songs
As we had listened to from happy birds
That filled the spring-time with their melody.
Then were we most exuberantly gay,
Inebriate with the mellowed wine of life!
Supposing in our sheer simplicity
That such must be the method Nature takes
In perfecting her numerous blest broods;
From lowliest forms evolving loftiest life,
And giving each experience of all.

“Ah well! But no; I will not call it well,
When, surely, it was sore and evil case,
As soon we found it, to our dire dismay;
For after sailing on the sportive wings
Of passing breezes, straightway down we fell
Upon the solid ground; and there we lay
In strange paralysis, between the strain
Of forces from below that ever strove
To drag us downward, and the crushing weight
Of an immense incumbent atmosphere.
And in the grasp of these remorseless bonds
Securely held, we now can but await
The final stroke that seals our destiny.

“Shocked, startled, stunned, by stress of such
a fall,
For long I lay in silence on the ground,
Expecting power to rise; but only grew
Stiffer and weaker each succeeding hour,
Till hope died out, and cheerful courage fled.
And vainly then I pondered o'er and o'er
The problem of my useless, wasted life;
The stupid cruelty of senseless Fate,

To call us, causeless, from nonentity,
And fashion us for life's exuberance,
Only to cast us, causeless, back again.
For as my strength each moment ebbed away.
The fact was plain to me that Nature now
Had quite exhausted all the store of force
She once possessed to work within our forms:
She had grown impotent, and left us thus,
Merely to perish: she could do no more.

“So I grew weary, waiting day by day,
Without the power to stir; and wasting fast;
Till gathering strength for one last weak attempt
I cried out in my bitterness of soul,
And wildly called on any Power that heard
To tell the meaning of Life's mystery;
And send us help; and comfort our poor hearts
With hopeful cheer; or else with one quick breath
To quench the tiny spark of vital flame
Which lingers but to lengthen out our woe,
And end this mocking and delusive dream
Miscalled our Life.

“And then, at last, outspoke
That solemn pine-tree yonder; and his words
Of heartless cruelty, in icy tones,
Have crushed all hope, and driven me quite wild
With the dread frenzy of a last despair.

“‘O Maple Leaf,’ he said, when I had paused
For lack of breath to voice my speechless grief,
‘Why strive against inevitable fate,
Or so insanely mourn your destiny,
For which the whole world has no remedy?
Is it not far the wiser, better course,
With calm and patient courage to submit,
When one has come to helpless evil state?’

“I answered not, for there was naught to say.
And he resumed, in cold, sepulchral tones,
And chilling whispers, that congealed my tears,
The while I, gasping, listened.

“‘Maple Leaf,’
With sighing voice he said, ‘I have stood still,
Growing perennial, in this same spot,
For years and years unnumbered; sighing low,
In ecstasy of fresh vitality

Through summers long, amid the burning heat;
And through still longer winters shivering
With bitter, crushing cold. Oft have I seen
The summers brighten over wood and fields;
And I have watched as oft the glorious sun
Shorten his journey through the cheerless days,
Too weak to mount his wonted altitudes,
Till I have feared that he would lapse and die,
And Nature's system sink in chaos dire.
But while I stood half-dazed in dread and doubt,
Wrapped in the fleecy furs that Winter throws
Around my shuddering shoulders in the gloom,
And pondered, wondering, he has returned,
And brought the light and life of earth again;
With wealth of vital energies in store
For the new Year that followed in his train.

“So, as the years rolled by, I have beheld
Uncounted generations of frail leaves,
As like to you as you are to yourself,
As you have done, spring from the parent stem,
To shine awhile in beauteous brilliancy,
And then to perish in stern Winter's doom.

Like you, through one brief season they endure,
And know the bliss of life; and then like you
They fall; and waiting lie until the frost,
Whose lightest touch alone you felt last night,
Burns all the tides of life left in their veins,
Making them shrivel in its frozen flame,
And crisply blacken, like those tinder shreds,
For sulphur, flint, and steel, prepared of yore.

“And then the howling winds of heaven let
loose,

Drive them in wild career along the ground,
And whirl them into hollows, far and nigh;
Or fling them down where foot of man or beast
Crushes them into graves of softened mold:
Or in what chancing hiding-place they drift
The rains, and suns, and frosts, dissolve them soon,
To nothingness; and they exist no more.
Your parent stem lives on, being like me
Endowed with immortality. And he,
With each returning season, will produce
Another generation of gay leaves,
As many seasons he has done before;

And they will fade and fall, as you but now
Have faded and have fallen: and they too
Will perish, as the others have, and as
Of course you must. You are not: and you are:
And soon you are no more. 'That is the whole.
The yearly suns successively return;
The earth in verdure fair again is clad;
But for the Leaf, it perishes. 'The whole
Is constant; though the individual,
In the forms manifold that Life evolves,
Is like the bubble bursting on the sea,
Appearing, perfect, for some little space;
'Then nowherē; and another in its place.
So life proceeds; and so the world goes on.'

"So spake he; and so ceased. And though to me
No faith remains in any form of Power;
No hope in aught existing anywhere;
Nor love for anything but Life alone;
Yet, day and night, grieving incessantly,
I feebly cry, and humbly supplicate
My Maker, and the sun, and fateful stars,
'The heavens, the dew-distilling clouds, and all

The potencies of the whole universe,
Beseeching them to spare to me the gift
Of my existence. Unto Life of Life
I rave in mad, importunate appeal
Not to withdraw itself from my embrace
And blot me out of being.

“Vainly, too,
With imbecile invective, I impugn
The weak creative energies that lack
Ability their fabrics to sustain.
I scoff and mock at their fatuity,
In working blindly all the ages through,
Only to let the ages following
Annihilate the products of their skill.
While to all else I add the potent plea,
That, inasmuch as I have done no ill,
Nor ever broken one of Nature's laws,
But have performed each prompting of her will,
There is no reason why I should incur
The penalty of Death. And in the name
Of Justice, I demand my right to live!

“And yet, in spite of protests and of prayers,
I feel my life-blood oozing fast away;
The fountains of my being drying up;
Its every function consciously decay.
I shrink and shudder, by my fate appalled,
As slowly and more slow the pulses throb
Along my veins; and fast the daylight wanes;
And weaker grows my every wasting sigh;
And fainter falls each echo of my cry,
My one wild, futile cry for life, sweet life!

“O Life! dear Life! though close I cling to thee,
And long, and pray, and supplicate, and beg
This only boon, that I may still exist,
To drink thy nectar-chalice, evermore,
Throughout the ages of eternity,
Yet here, upon the Earth’s cold bosom prone,
Thou leavest me to famish and expire.”
Then the voice ceased.

“Nay, nay,” exclaimed the Sage,
Awaking with a start, “I did but dream
This gruesome dream. And surely it is strange
That for the truth the mind in sleep accepts

That which the waking thought deems fallacy.
Truly, I know not why one ever should,
Though he be sane, become irrational,
Merely because the avenues of sense
Are closed to things material. Nor why,
In slumber, thus the Mind's grave sentinels
Basely betray the citadel of Truth.

“And, certainly, one needs but look to see
That ever wise and prudent Nature wastes
No life of leaf; nor anything that grows.
For in her plan for sustenance of life,
Through vegetative growths and processes,
The leaf is but a tool wherewith she works.
And when her ends benign have been achieved
In the development of vital food
For all the creatures of her teeming world,
She simply lays aside, through her brief night,
The instruments, now needless for her use,
Whereby her offices have been performed;
Kindly releasing them from servitude
To elemental liberty again,
While she enjoys a season of repose.

“ But as for the Leaf's life, it does not die :
Nothing but life can live ; nor could aught else
Lose a vitality it ne'er possessed.
The substance of the leaf but undergoes
The loss involved in change of state and place :
As lifeless, organized material,
Its particles of water, earth and air,
A close relationship with life sustain ;
But when this bond of union is dissolved
The atoms seek their kindred kinds again,
And, in diverse conditions, still remain
The same continuous identities.

“ The Leaf, objective, known in realms of
sense,
Seeming alive, is merely mineral,
And of no potency of life possessed,
Nor individual capacity
Of separate existence in itself :
The one life, whole and indivisible,
Belonging to the tree, which weaves the leaves
About it, in a robe of verdancy.
As though I had a hundred thousand hands,

And round about my fingers I should twine
The meshes of a glove of silken green,
Infusing it with my own vital force:
Then, as the warmth and motion of my hand,
Extending through the glove, would use its form,
Making its senseless substance seem alive,
So does the vital essence of the tree,
Pervading all the substance of its leaves,
Work in and through their forms, until its task
Has been performed; and then it merely draws
The fingers of its leafy life within;
Casting aside its now unneeded tools,
Yet losing nothing of vitality;
As I withdraw my fingers from my glove,
And toss it down, unneeded or outworn,
While I, myself, remain, intact, the same.

“The deathless spirit of the living tree,
An entity indissoluble, dwells
In the tree’s form, complete: no broken branch
Can mar its symmetry, whether displayed
In garb of green to gaze of human eyes,
Or in no guise of sense it be expressed.

The unconsuming flame of life may glow,
Octaves beyond the limits of our sense,
Too purely and transparently, for us
With clay-born sight its presence to detect,
Lighting those forms of animated dust
That brighten Earth with loveliness and bloom,
Which else were but a desert and a tomb.
But Forms of life phenomenal are not
Essential Life itself: they are no more
Than the mere dress which Life may don or doff;
The habitations where it dwells, and grows,
And wakes or sleeps, and works its various will,
While to the senses of our walled-in souls
It shadows forth the things invisible.

“Yet he who sees with vision beyond sense
May watch, with inner sight, the tree’s true Life,
What time it shakes its myriad fingers free,
As folding close its strong, unsundered arms,
The weary spirit of the lofty tree
Bows its proud head, and slowly sliding down
The towering trunk that coffins it in vain,
Sinks gently to its rest beneath the sod,

Where undisturbed by discords of the day,
And warmly wrapped in snows of softest down,
It dreams of past accomplishment, and hope
Of future growth and grace; till Nature's voice
Calls it again to work of waking life,
In a new cycle of beneficence.

“And furthermore, the spirit of the tree
Is to no fate of isolation doomed,
Even through Winter's desolating reign.
For each umbrageous growth is but a part
Infinitesimally small; a point
Most insignificant; a digit low;
The fraction of a fraction most minute,
Of Nature's vast and venerable scheme
Of vegetative life that yearly lies,
Not dead, but dormant, under marble snows,
Sleeping away the season's dreary night,
With friendly arms outstretched and intertwined,
Hand grasping hand, in the fond clasp of love
Whose strength supports the world.

“For but one life
Breathes in the vegetal creation; all

Its pulses from the heart of Nature throb;
One life-blood fills all vegetable veins;
One spirit quickens all; and all its growths,
Whether they yield of fruitage kindly store,
Or only wealth of foliage and bloom,
Are but the fingers multitudinous
Which many-handed Nature thrusts each year
Up through the mold, to bathe them in the light.

“And even so, feeding upon the food
Which only vegetation can produce,
The one sole sustenance by which the life
Of higher creatures is made possible,
The animal to this same life is joined,
Basing its life upon the life below,
And but subsists in unity therewith.
So, also, from these vital sources fed,
Transmuting in himself all lower lives,
Must man with them be ultimately one;
While by his better side with angels joined:
And he, and they, and all created things,
Draw life from God, and live and move in Him,

And share in Him the one and only Life
Which holds the Universe in unity.

“And shall the Architect who formed the plan
Of this fair world, and then so wondrously
Developed its diversities of good,
His skill exhausted, lack ability
His marvelous creations to sustain?
Or, after having planned and worked his will,
Esteem his handicraft so valueless
As to condemn it to nonentity?

“Oh fools, and blind, to judge your Maker so!
For he who formed the fine-veined leaf, and sent
The tiny currents tingling through its bounds,
Who rolled the leagues of forest on Earth’s
 shores,
And gives the impetus to Ocean’s tides;
Whose pulses beat in every lustrous star,
And surge throughout infinitudes of space,
Can scarce be thought to find a greater task
In restoration of his ruined works
Than, at the first, creating them had been:
Nor deemed, from his displays of potency,

Ever to fail in his experiments;
Nor yet, either to be incompetent
To guard his creatures from destructive foes,
Or else, his works so lightly to regard
As wantonly to waste the wise results
Of his omnipotent activities.

“Proud Man, indeed, who did not make himself,
Nor one small atom of the world create,
Who cannot tell whence life originates,
Nor find the line where mind and matter meet,
Wisely pronounces that no Being else
Has done what he, himself, could not perform.
But that the system, complicate and vast,
Of this great Universe, has been evolved
By nothing, out of nothing; and itself
Impels its own development; although,
With generous intention, all things work
To the one end of Man's supremacy.

“But what a more amazing thing can be
Than for frail man to take the powers bestowed
By his Creator, and complacently
Against the Giver turn their energies?

God's finger starts the warm blood's vital throb
Through the cold hearts whose love he seeks in
vain.

He keeps the red streams circling through man's
frame,

Which, if they stop, none else can start again.

And it is God's indulgent fatherhood

That furnishes the force electrical

Working in human consciousness, whereby

His children may his sovereignty defy,

Though stones and stars alike his will obey,

And all things, finally, must own his sway,

When through Life's maze, now so misunderstood,

Shall be revealed the Mystery of Good.

“Wherefore, no tender leaf need fear to fade;

No trembling sparrow fear lest it should fall

Unheeded to the ground; nor aught that breathes

Should hesitate to yield its vital spark,

At the behest of Life Omnipotent;

Letting the Form it wore disintegrate,

And calmly rest in elemental death,

Till God shall please its spirit to restore

And quicken it with gladsome life once more.
For naught that lives, and keeps the vital laws
Impressed upon Creation, need expect
Worse fate than due returns of day and night,
With periods of labor and of rest :
Since life proceeds from God alone, and is
Part of his Spirit, indestructible.

“Nor need the splendid stars that wheel through
space

Yield to despair, though in the lapse of time,
All black and rayless they may grow, and sink
To some far corner of the universe,
In the cold gloom of awful night to lie ;
Nor yet one grain of sand anticipate
Eternal dissolution ; forasmuch
As all things, everywhere existent, form
Component parts of one creative plan,
And are the members in particular
Of the one Body of the Universe.
And, therefore, each may patiently await,
However long its coming be delayed,
The rhythmic flood of energy divine

Whose ebb is prophecy of future flow:—
That tide whose swift recurring intervals
And slowly solemn surgings have combined
Their various measures, through Creation's term,
To mark the strange and complicated time
To which is set the Music of the Spheres.

“But, least of all, should most exalted Man,
The image of his Maker, shrink with dread,
When called to lay his mortal body down
To sleep awhile upon its mother's breast,
Until the pulses of the Life Supreme,
Returning, throb through his immortal part,
And wake him to another morning's light.
For he alone, of Earth's inhabitants,
Is Son of the Most High, and is not left,
As lower creatures are, in ignorance
Regarding ages that are yet to come;
But, as befits his station, he has had
A revelation of the brighter day
To dawn upon the world; when through the Life
Of Him who suffered to redeem his world
From sin and death, man, too, shall live again

In a new life of fresh activity;
With garnered strength from night of needful rest;
And with the wisdom of experience,
To which the world's career of sin and pain
Has made him rightful heir.

“And since, besides,
To this sure word of prophecy divine,
Wise Science adds its testimony true,
That all the energies of potent force,
Though they may change, must in some form
survive;

While from the universe no atom small
Of matter's substance ever can be lost:
With his assurance made thus doubly sure,
Secure in his existence, Man may rest,
Though in the grave his earthly body lie
Beside the leaflet's fragile form, and all
The brotherhood of ashes and of dust:
Content with them to molder back to clay,
Alike to furnish food for other life,
As other forms had furnished food for them:
And so, in lowliness, await the hour

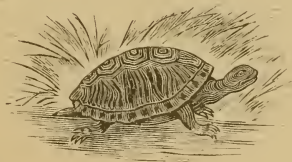
Of joyful resurrection, when the strife
Of finite with the infinite shall cease;
When, through our errors, we have learned to
live

In full accord with universal laws,
Making life constant and immutable,
And the dry bones of our Humanity
Immortal life put on; for only so
Can death be swallowed up in victory.

“So, when Man fadeth, like the grass, away,
Whether the bed whereon he rests be made
Beneath the shadows of celestial walls;
In deepest hell; or in the sea's abyss;
Or in some cave of earth's remotest bounds,
The all-pervading Deity is there:
And underneath his pillow he may feel
The comfort of the Everlasting Arms,
While peacefully he sleeps away the scars
That sin has burned upon his erring soul;
And pangs of past mortality become
The recollections of a fitful dream,

Warning his future Self from evil ways
Lying athwart his endless destiny.

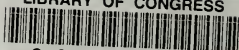
“Then shall appear the day when faith will turn
To knowledge absolute, of Love divine,
Which fills the measures of immensity,
And wraps the boundless with its ample folds:
And God, in his Creation, shall be known
As Good Supreme, eternally expressed.”







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